



Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, except Technical and Scientific Products

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Job Overview

We are all familiar with the wide variety of products in retail stores. Towels on the shelf at a linen store. Coats on the rack in a clothing store. What might not be so familiar is the process that gets those goods on those shelves.

Manufacturers can't just drive up to a store and dump 10,000 pairs of blue jeans or 5,000 bottles of aspirin on the sidewalk. There needs to be an efficient and orderly process that gets products from the supplier to the retail establishment. Vital to that process are Sales Representatives who work for manufacturing or distributing firms.

The Sales Representative's job is to market goods to retail stores and other sales outlets, who in turn market these products to retail customers. They may also market their goods to wholesalers or distributors. Sometimes they work with their customers to display merchandise in an attractive fashion to stimulate sales. They work with their customers to answer questions about products, point out the advantages of their products over the competition, and work to get the most products sold. They discuss prices, special buying opportunities, and availability of products.

Sales Representatives may work for one company, or they may market products for several manufacturers or wholesalers. This broad occupational classification is found in a variety of industries, but does not include workers who sell scientific or technical goods and products at a wholesale level.

Those employed directly by a manufacturer or wholesaler are often called Sales Representatives. Manufacturers' Agents or Manufacturers' Representatives are self-employed sales workers who contract their services to many types of manufacturing companies.

Typical Tasks

- Identify prospective customers by using business directories, following leads from existing clients, participating in organizations and clubs, and attending trade shows and conferences.
- Contact regular and prospective customers to demonstrate products, explain product features, and solicit orders.
- Answer customers' questions about products, prices, availability, product uses, and credit terms.
- Recommend products to customers, based on customers' needs and interests.

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- ➔ Estimate or quote prices, credit or contract terms, warranties, and delivery dates.
- ➔ Consult with clients after sales or contract signings in order to resolve problems and to provide ongoing support.
- ➔ Prepare drawings, estimates, and bids that meet specific customer needs.
- ➔ Provide customers with product samples and catalogs.
- ➔ Arrange and direct delivery and installation of products and equipment.
- ➔ Monitor market conditions, product innovations, and competitors' products, prices, and sales.
- ➔ Negotiate details of contracts and payments, and prepare sales contracts and order forms.
- ➔ Perform administrative duties, such as preparing sales budgets and reports, keeping sales records, and filing expense account reports.

People who like to work independently, enjoy talking with people, and who are self-motivated would likely make good Sales Representatives.

*Detailed descriptions of this occupation may be found in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) at online.onetcenter.org.*

Important Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities

- ➔ Active Listening — Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- ➔ Speaking — Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- ➔ Time Management — Managing one's own time and the time of others.
- ➔ Reading Comprehension — Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
- ➔ Persuasion — Persuading others to change their minds or behavior.
- ➔ Sales and Marketing — Knowledge of principles and methods for showing, promoting, and selling products or services. This includes marketing strategy and tactics, product demonstration, sales techniques, and sales control systems.
- ➔ Customer and Personal Service — Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.

Work Environment

The work environment can vary considerably, depending upon the amount of travel the job requires. Some Sales Representatives work mainly in an office setting, calling customers and doing paperwork, while others spend most of their day in the field, visiting customers and showing them the company's products. Some Representatives have large territories and must spend days or weeks at a time away from home.

Offices are generally well lit and temperature controlled. Out in the field, working conditions can range from driving an air-conditioned car to demonstrating construction equipment in a muddy field in the rain.

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Although some Representatives fly to visit customers or trade shows, they mostly travel by car. They often carry samples or catalogs with them, which may be awkward or heavy to carry.

Employers often set quotas on sales. Since Representatives most often work on commission, they are under pressure to sell to existing customers, and to call on other businesses in order to expand their clientele.

California's Job Outlook and Wages

The California Outlook and Wage table below represents the occupation across all industries.

Standard Occupational Classification	Estimated Number of Workers 2004	Estimated Number of Workers 2014	Average Annual Openings	2006 Wage Range (per hour)
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41-4012	148,000	178,500	6,940	\$17.30 to \$35.69

Wages do not reflect self-employment.

Average annual openings include new jobs plus net replacements.

Source: www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov, Employment Projections by Occupation and OES Employment & Wages by Occupation, Labor Market Information Division, Employment Development Department.

Employment of Sales Representatives in wholesale and manufacturing industries is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations through the year 2014, primarily because of continued growth in the variety and number of goods to be sold. Also, many job openings will result from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Employment opportunities and earnings fluctuate from year to year as changing economic conditions, legislative issues, and consumer preferences affect sales.

In addition to those working directly for a firm, many Sales Representatives are self-employed or form small sales firms and work for a straight commission based on the value of their own sales. Usually, however, these workers gain experience and recognition with a manufacturer or wholesaler before becoming self-employed.

Compensation methods vary significantly by the type of firm and the product sold. Most employers use a combination of salary and commissions or salary plus bonus. Commissions are usually based on the amount of sales, whereas bonuses may depend on individual performance, on the performance of all sales workers in the group or district, or on the company's performance.

Trends

A significant trend is the increased practice of multiple companies sharing one Sales Representative to handle different merchandise lines, spreading costs among several employers.

Training/Requirements/Apprenticeships

The background needed for sales jobs varies by product line and market. Many employers hire individuals with previous sales experience who lack a college degree, but they increasingly prefer

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or require a bachelor's degree because job requirements have become more technical and analytical. Nevertheless, for some consumer products, factors such as sales ability, personality, and familiarity with brands are more important than educational background.

Many companies have formal training programs for beginning Sales Representatives lasting up to two years. However, most businesses are accelerating these programs to reduce costs and expedite the returns from training. In some programs, trainees rotate among jobs in plants and offices to learn all phases of production, installation, and distribution of the product. In others, trainees take formal classroom instruction at the plant, followed by on-the-job training under the supervision of a field sales manager.

About half of the nation's Sales Representatives for wholesale and manufacturing firms are college graduates, according to a U.S. Department of Labor survey. Twenty-five percent indicate some college background, with the remainder reporting they had a high school diploma or less.

Those who want to become Sales Representatives should be goal oriented, persuasive, and able to work well both independently and as part of a team. A pleasant personality and appearance, the ability to communicate well with people, and problem-solving skills are highly valued. Patience, perseverance, and the ability to handle rejection are key to completing a sale.

Recommended High School Course Work

Classes in English, business, mathematics, and computers are helpful. Courses in public speaking, communication, and theater arts can help students who wish to learn how to communicate more effectively.

Where Do I Find the Job?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods.

Use the *Search for Employers by Industry* feature on the *Career Center* page at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov to locate employers in your area. Search under the following industry names to get a list of private firms and their addresses:

- ➡ Farm Supplies Merchant Wholesalers
- ➡ General Line Grocery Merchant Whsle
- ➡ Industrial Machinery Merchant Whsle
- ➡ Merchant Wholesalers
- ➡ Motion Picture and Video Distribution
- ➡ Wholesale Trade Agents and Brokers

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- ➡ Automobile Parts, Supplies, & Accessories — Whsle & Mfrs
- ➡ Contractor's Equipment & Supplies
- ➡ Farm Equipment
- ➡ Furniture Dealers —Whsle
- ➡ Grocers & Markets - Whsle
- ➡ Manufacturers' Agents & Representatives

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Where Can the Job Lead?

Frequently, promotion takes the form of an assignment to a larger account or territory where commissions are likely to be greater. Experienced Sales Representatives may move into jobs as sales trainers, who instruct new employees on selling techniques and on company policies and procedures. Those who have good sales records and leadership ability may advance to higher level positions such as sales supervisor, district manager, or vice president of sales. In addition to advancement opportunities within a firm, some Manufacturers' Agents go into business for themselves.

Related Occupations

Wholesale and Retail Buyers, Except Farm Products

Retail Salespersons (see *Occupational Guide No.536*)

Sales Representatives, Wholesale, and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products

Public Relations Specialists (see *Occupational Guide No.276*)

Insurance Sales Agents (see *Occupational Guide No.455*)

Other Sources

Manufacturers' Agents National Association
www.manaonline.org

National Association of Manufacturers
www.nam.org

Manufacturers' Representatives Educational Research Foundation
www.mrerf.org

California Association of Regional Occupational Centers and Programs
www.carocp.org

